United States General Accounting Office

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives

March 1986

JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT

Data Collection Efforts and Needs

GAO/HRD-86-69BR

UNITED STATES GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20548

HUMAN RESOURCES
DIVISION

March 31, 1986

B-221143

The Honorable Matthew G. Martinez
Chairman, Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

During the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) oversight hearings conducted by your Subcommittee on May 2, 1985, we agreed to provide information on the JTPA data collection system. This briefing report is in response to that agreement.

In carrying out our work, we focused on obtaining information on the adequacy of the Department of Labor's JTPA data collection system, Labor's January 1986 proposed revisions to its reporting requirements, and the extent to which these revisions would address data system shortcomings. We concentrated primarily on Labor's system as it relates to the collection of data on the title IIA program for disadvantaged youths and adults, the largest program authorized under JTPA, in terms of both the number of participants and program funding.[1]

Our work was done in Washington, D.C., where we spoke with officials from the Department of Labor responsible for JTPA activities and representatives from eight groups in the job training community--the National Alliance of Business, the National Association of Private Industry Councils, the National Commission for Employment Policy, the National Governors' Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Job Training Partnership, Inc., the National Association of Counties, and the U.S. Conference of Mayors. We also spoke by telephone with officials from 13 states and two service delivery areas (SDAs)--units of local government that carry out job training services. In addition, we chaired a panel discussion by representatives of the job training community to discuss JTPA data collection issues. Most of our work was done from July through November 1985. We

---

[1]The act also authorizes a summer youth program (title IIB); a program for dislocated workers, e.g., those who have lost their jobs because of plant closings (title III); and federally administered programs, e.g., Job Corps and programs for Native Americans (title IV). (Titles I and V address general program and administrative issues and contain changes to other federal programs, e.g., state employment service agencies.)

delayed completing this report to review Labor's January 1986 proposed revisions, but we did not solicit the views of members of the job training community on the proposed revisions.

In summary, we noted that although Labor's existing data collection system has limitations, its recently proposed reporting revisions, if approved by the Office of Management and Budget, should eliminate many of these shortcomings. Labor has made significant progress since its revised system should provide better data for use in setting performance standards and considerably more detailed information for program management and oversight.

However, because some limitations will remain, important programmatic data useful for congressional oversight may continue to be missing or may be unreliable. Chief among these limitations are (1) the lack of specificity of definitions, which will result in data being accumulated that are not similar and therefore cannot be reliably interpreted or compared across states and SDAs; (2) inconsistency in the amount and type of data maintained among SDAs, which may result in national estimates of JTPA participant characteristics and termination outcomes that are not representative; and (3) lack of sufficient information to adequately measure the amount of training provided to program participants. (These limitations restrict the usefulness of Labor's current source of data on individual enrollees and terminees--the data set needed for analysis of participant characteristics in relation to services provided and program outcomes.) Our observations on these limitations are summarized beginning on page 18.

Labor's new plan for evaluating JTPA through a series of experiments in up to 20 SDAs is a significant improvement over Labor's original approach, although it too may have some limitations (including such practical problems as gaining the cooperation of program operators in conducting the experiments). However, no evaluation approach is totally free of problems, and Labor's proposed evaluation is a superior means of measuring program effect.

As agreed with your office, we did not obtain official comments from Labor. However, we gave Labor officials an opportunity to review a draft of this document, and their comments have been included where appropriate.

We are sending copies of this briefing report to the Secretary of Labor, the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties and will make copies available to others upon request. Should you need additional information on the contents of this document, please call me on 275-5365.

Sincerely yours,

William J. Gainer

William J. Gainer
Associate Director

Contents

	Page
BACKGROUND	4
LABOR'S INITIAL JTPA DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM	4
LABOR'S INITIAL SYSTEM HAD LIMITATIONS	6
LABOR'S DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK	11
RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LABOR'S JTPA DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS	12
IMPROVEMENTS IN THE NEW REPORTING PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTED ADDITIONS	15
GAO OBSERVATIONS	18

Tables

1	Labor's Initial Data Collection Framework for JTPA	11
2	Labor's Proposed Reporting Revisions--Improvements and Limitations	21

ABBREVIATIONS

CETA	Comprehensive Employment and Training Act
GAO	General Accounting Office
JTPA	Job Training Partnership Act
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
SDA	service delivery area

JOB TRAINING PARTNERSHIP ACT:

DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS AND NEEDS

BACKGROUND

On October 1, 1983, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) replaced the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) as the nation's primary federally funded employment and training program. Under JTPA, many administrative and oversight functions have been shifted from the Department of Labor, the federal administering agency, to the states. Under JTPA the governors are responsible for overseeing the performance of local service delivery areas (SDAs) through which job training services are provided. SDAs may include the entire state or one or more units of local government. JTPA title IIA, the training program for disadvantaged adults and youths, has been funded at about $1.9 billion annually through June 30, 1986.

JTPA is a performance-oriented program. The act states that the basic measure of performance is the increase in employment and earnings and the decrease in welfare dependency. To determine if these objectives are met, the act requires the Department of Labor to establish performance standards. The Secretary of Labor is given wide latitude to set standards and to specify outcomes, such as job placement and improved employability of youths, as well as longer term outcomes that relate to increased employment and earnings and decreased welfare dependency.

In carrying out these requirements, Labor is authorized by the act to direct the states to maintain and report specified information on program performance. The act also directs Labor to provide program oversight, to evaluate the effect of JTPA on participant earnings and welfare status, and to submit an annual report to the Congress summarizing the findings on and achievements of JTPA. To comply with these provisions, Labor established a data collection system, of which some portions are still in existence, others are being revised, and still others have been or are to be discontinued. The following describes Labor's data collection efforts.

LABOR'S INITIAL JTPA DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM

In implementing JTPA, Labor established national performance standards for measuring participant outcome at termination based on experience from the prior CETA program. In addition, it intended to establish standards for measuring JTPA's impact on participants' postprogram labor-market experience and welfare status using data accumulated from a proposed comprehensive reporting system. In April 1983, after consulting with state and

local officials, congressional staff members, and other representatives of the employment and training community, Labor proposed a system that would have required states to collect and report data from each SDA on title IIA participants' preprogram and postprogram economic experience. Postprogram data were to be collected through follow-up contacts with former participants 13 weeks after termination.

In July 1983, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) rejected Labor's proposal, stating that such universal reporting requirements were not needed to meet federal responsibilities, that sampling could be used instead, that postprogram data collection was too burdensome to states and SDAs, and that Labor's proposed long-term study (the Job Training Longitudinal Survey) for evaluating program effectiveness could provide some of the information needed to establish national standards. Labor, therefore, dropped its proposed postprogram reporting requirement.

The resulting JTPA annual status report, approved by OMB in September 1983, contained considerably fewer data items than originally proposed on terminees' socioeconomic characteristics and no information on participant postprogram follow-up. The annual status report, as approved by OMB, gave Labor summary data on each SDA's program participants and terminees, the terminees' socioeconomic characteristics, and program performance in relation to the standards for measuring immediate outcomes. Its primary purpose has been to develop performance standards at the national level and give the states information to adjust the standards to take into account local economic, geographic, and demographic factors. As noted, follow-up information on the performance of participants after leaving the program was eliminated. In addition, the level of detail was reduced for many categories, including youth employability enhancement terminations, age, education, family status, unemployment compensation, labor-force status, and wage and welfare data.

Labor also proposed, and in September 1983 OMB approved, a JTPA quarterly status report from the states to obtain summary data on the number of participants and program costs. This report provided statewide program expenditure data. While the states were required to submit this report each quarter during the first 9 months of JTPA, they now only have to do so annually.

Labor also looked to its Job Training Longitudinal Survey as another source of program data. This survey was designed to collect data on a national sample of JTPA participants and three comparison groups of nonparticipants. As originally planned, the survey consisted of (1) a quick turnaround component, (2) a longitudinal component for JTPA participants, and (3) a longitudinal component for nonparticipant comparison groups.

The quick turnaround component was designed to gather descriptive statistics on a sample of JTPA enrollees and terminees on a quarterly basis from a sample of 194 of the 594 SDAs nationwide. The major objective of this component was to permit national estimates of the numbers and characteristics of enrollees and terminees as well as termination outcomes of major program activities within 4 months after each quarter.

A more detailed, longitudinal component was to provide extensive data on the socioeconomic characteristics and labor-force experiences of a subsample of the enrollees included in the quick turnaround sample. This component was to merge the limited quick turnaround data with information obtained in three personal and telephone interviews, conducted about 6, 12, and 21 months after entry into a JTPA program. These detailed data would then document the socioeconomic and labor-force histories of JTPA participants both before and after program participation (as well as in-program experiences). These data would also permit the examination of gross preprogram to postprogram changes in earnings and labor-force participation and the analysis of net program impact nationwide.

A comparison group component was to provide longitudinal data on three sets of nonparticipants. These files were to be used in conjunction with the file of JTPA participants, along with earnings data, to perform the impact evaluations. The comparison groups were to be developed from two existing Census Bureau surveys--the Current Population Survey and the Survey of Income and Program Participation. A third survey, the Survey of History of Work, was to be developed expressly for JTPA.

LABOR'S INITIAL SYSTEM HAD LIMITATIONS

The initial system for obtaining information on JTPA programs through the various reports and the longitudinal survey had limitations; as a result, the employment and training community raised questions about the validity and reliability of the data that had or would have been provided. Specific limitations associated with each data collection method are discussed below. However, one problem common to all collection methods is the lack of specificity of definitions.

Labor has interpreted its role under JTPA to be one of providing broad policy guidance and oversight; therefore, it has implemented regulations that give the states authority to interpret most provisions of the law. Consistent with that view, Labor has provided few specific definitions of program terms. Although it has provided a glossary of definitions, such terms are broadly defined and allow the states significant discretion in determining what a particular term covers.

For example, Labor's definition of "job placement" would permit one entity to define a placement as being accepted for employment regardless of whether it was only for a short time or on a part-time basis. Another may require that a person be employed for a specified number of weeks and work a specified number of hours per week before being considered a placement. As another example, the way states define a participant's "termination" from the program may vary. A termination may occur in one state immediately after a person completes the training program. Another state may place a person in a "holding status" for a specified period following completion of training and only then is he or she categorized as terminated. As a result of these different definitions, the data collected will lack consistency and confuse interpretation of program results.[1] This raises the question as to whether the data can be reliably interpreted or compared soundly across states and SDAs.

The job training community and state and local officials we spoke with unanimously agreed on the need for more specificity of terms within the JTPA data system. For the most part, they believed these terms should be limited in number but should include items used in comparisons. Three state officials and representatives of two job training community groups we spoke with suggested that more specific terms could be developed by an advisory group similar to one used to develop performance standards.

The following is a discussion of other limitations of each of Labor's data collection methods.

Job training annual status report

The annual status report contains summary information on JTPA participation and terminations collected annually by each of the 594 SDAs and forwarded to Labor through the states. It also contains data on performance and socioeconomic measures for terminees. As discussed, the report Labor initially proposed to OMB contained many more data items than the report that was eventually approved. As a result, information that was originally considered important by Labor was not available from the local level. For example,

--there are no postprogram follow-up data;

--age distinctions are limited, especially with respect to youths and young adults;

---

[1]For example, the different time frames for terminations may make suspect any cross-state analysis of length of program stay.

--the severity of unemployment, in terms of length, is not identified;

--the length and type of welfare is not identified; and

--educational attainment beyond high school is not recognized.

Such information would have given Labor better data to use in setting performance standards and more descriptive information on who is being served by JTPA programs.

Members of the employment and training community have pointed out that because the annual status report, as now designed, does not include all outcomes permitted by JTPA, it may direct programs away from the more disadvantaged clients. In particular, youth employment competency attainment (i.e., employment-enhancing skills, such as proficiency in basic education skills) is not reported separately. As indicated by Labor, this could result in program administrators focusing on activities that result in placements rather than on developing skills that would improve the employability of disadvantaged in-school youths. This could mean severe restrictions in programs aimed at dropout prevention. The employment and training community also questioned whether requiring only annual reporting gave Labor timely enough information to adequately manage JTPA.

Job training quarterly status report

This report was submitted by the states to Labor quarterly during the first 9 months of JTPA and annually thereafter. It contains statewide summary data on the total number of participants and total expenditures for training, participant support, and administration.

The expenditures information included in the quarterly status report on the states' set-aside programs[2] cannot be separately identified, nor can the number of participants served by each such program be determined. As a result, Labor has incomplete information on the use of these funds and is unable to respond routinely to congressional and other requests for set-aside information. Moreover, no program-wide information on

[2]Twenty-two percent of a state's JTPA title IIA funding is set aside for special purposes. Specifically, 5 percent is set aside for state administrative costs, 6 percent for incentive grants and technical assistance, 8 percent for state education coordination and grants, and 3 percent for state older worker programs.

funding and participants served under the set-aside provisions is available from other data sources.

Members of the employment and training community question whether the OMB-approved annual reporting requirement is of sufficient frequency. Labor officials believe that more frequent reporting would be desirable, as discussed on page 17.

Job Training Longitudinal Survey

Labor's long-term effort to measure the impact of JTPA consists of three segments--a quick turnaround component and two longitudinal components. Each has shortcomings that raise questions about the usefulness and reliability of the data collected.

Quick turnaround component

The quick turnaround data, which are drawn from a nationwide sample of 194 SDAs, are used to provide national estimates of JTPA enrollee and terminee characteristics as well as termination outcomes. These data supplement the annual status report submitted by each SDA by providing more detailed descriptive statistics on enrollees and terminees and do so on a quarterly basis. Therefore, this report is available much earlier than the annual status report. The quick turnaround survey data, however, were intended to provide nationwide estimates and cannot be used to furnish data on individual state or local programs. In addition, although the survey attempts to obtain information on length and type of training provided, it does not seek data on the quantity of training in hours--a major indicator of the extent to which services are received. Further, while the survey seeks more data items than required by the annual status report, its source is the SDA records, so the availability of such data depends on whether they are collected and recorded by the SDAs.

Many SDAs collect data above and beyond the limited amount required for the annual report; however, they do not do so consistently. An analysis by a private contractor (SRI International) hired by Labor showed that, in fiscal year 1984, over one-third of the SDAs did not maintain certain participant characteristic data collected through the quick turnaround survey. Such data included the number and age of dependents, whether individuals had exhausted their unemployment compensation benefits, and the average wage on their previous job. According to Labor, data items with a nonresponse rate greater than 10 percent are not used in its analysis. As a result, some data items requested in the quick turnaround survey are not available for such analysis. The contractor also noted that the time frame for certain items varied. For example, while about 90 percent of the SDAs recorded preenrollment work history

information, some obtained this information on participants for the 13 weeks prior to program enrollment, and others recorded it for the prior 26 weeks.

As discussed by a representative of the job training community, if an agency does not collect a large proportion of the information being sought, the quick turnaround results may not accurately reflect the experience of the participants in the sample and, therefore, may not be representative. Furthermore, even if collected by most SDAs, the data still may lose some value because the information may not have been gathered systematically and consistently. In addition, as noted, the data enable only nationwide estimates and have limited or no validity for any particular state or locality. Also, since the quick turnaround data do not include quantity of training in hours, the extent of training provided to program participants cannot be adequately measured. For example, there is no way of knowing whether welfare recipients who were in classroom training for 10 weeks received 40 hours of training or 400.

The quick turnaround data base (including the longitudinal participant subsample) is the only current source available containing socioeconomic characteristics of individual participants. As a result, it is the only data source permitting analyses of multiple characteristics, including multiple characteristics in relation to services provided and program outcomes (i.e., cross-tabulations). Such detailed data enable refined analyses of who is being served. For example, the age and education level, sex, race, and welfare status of those receiving on-the-job training might be determined. The other sources contain only aggregate data and therefore--unlike individual data bases--cannot be used to determine who was served in relation to services received and outcomes.

Analyses of individual data are important for program oversight. They also could be helpful in establishing performance standards and in developing a methodology for adjusting such standards to reflect local conditions.

Job Training Longitudinal
Survey components

Certain problems associated with the longitudinal component data limit their usefulness for evaluating the net impact of JTPA. These problems can be categorized as data base limitations and methodological constraints.

Data base limitations include limited availability of earnings data for participant and comparison groups because of confidentiality concerns and limited sample sizes of participant and nonparticipant groups. The JTPA long-term survey, which was modeled after CETA's longitudinal survey, would face the same

methodological constraints as those experienced under that previous survey, particularly in the construction of comparison groups. This would preclude adequately measuring the effects of JTPA on participants' labor market success.

LABOR'S DATA COLLECTION FRAMEWORK

Table 1 summarizes Labor's initial JTPA data collection efforts, including a description of each, its purpose, and its limitations.

Table 1:
Labor's Initial Data Collection Framework for JTPA

Reports	Source of data	Description	Purpose	Limitations
Annual Status Report	All SDAs throughout the state	SDA-wide, cumulative data on total participants, termination status, performance measures, and socioeconomic characteristics of all terminees.	To obtain information on terminee characteristics.	Includes relatively few socioeconomic data items and no youth employment competency outcomes. Data items aggregated, making analysis difficult. Annual reporting only. Inconsistency between state definitions.
Quarterly Status Report (Expenditure Report)	All states on a state-wide basis	Summary cumulative data on participation and program costs.	To determine numbers served and expenditures.	Submitted annually. Inconsistency between state definitions.
Job Training Longitudinal Survey				
Quick Turnaround Survey	Quarterly sample of 6,000 enrollees and 3,000 terminees by Census Bureau from a sample of 194 SDAs	Demographic, socioeconomic, and program participation data obtained from administrative files.	To provide descriptive statistics on enrollees and terminees and to supplement the annual status report.	Provides nationwide data only. No geographical breakout. Inconsistent data between SDAs. Inconsistent recordkeeping by SDAs results in low response rates for some items. No data available on quantity of training by hours.

Reports	Source of data	Description	Purpose	Limitations
Longitudinal Participant Survey	An annual subsample of 10,000 enrollees from the quick turnaround sample	Provides micro-data on participants, including preprogram demographic and socioeconomic data, program participation data, and 21-month follow-up data obtained through personal interviews with participants.	To examine the gross pre- to postprogram changes in earnings and labor-force experiences and to assess program impact.	Problems with earnings data, geographic data, and timing may hamper impact evaluation. Data would not be available for several years because of the nature of longitudinal studies.
Longitudinal Comparison Survey (never implemented)	Two ongoing Census Bureau surveys and another created for JTPA	Provides micro-data on control group, including demographic and socioeconomic data over various time periods obtained through personal interviews with nonparticipant control group.	To compare program participants with nonparticipants to measure impact of program.	Sample size may be insufficient for some subgroup net impact analysis. Problems with earnings data, geographic data, and timing may hamper impact evaluation. Data would not be available for several years because of the nature of longitudinal studies.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN LABOR'S JTPA DATA COLLECTION EFFORTS

In January 1986, Labor initiated actions to change its data collection system. It plans to phase out the longitudinal participant component of its long-term study, eliminate the longitudinal comparison groups, and modify the quick turnaround component. It also has proposed, for the first time since the inception of JTPA, significant changes to its annual and quarterly status reports.

Portions of long-term study to be eliminated or modified

Because of problems recognized in its longitudinal study of JTPA, some of which were discussed earlier, Labor has undertaken a number of corrective actions. It had several consultants evaluate specific aspects of its JTPA evaluation plans. It also formed a technical advisory panel made up of recognized experts in social research to examine the plans for the Job Training Longitudinal Survey. Based on the panel's report that Labor's longitudinal study could not determine net impact, Labor developed a new plan for evaluating JTPA programs.

Labor's plan consists of several initiatives. Most notably, in place of a national comparison group to estimate program impact, it intends to undertake field experiments at up to 20 SDAs to evaluate the benefits and costs of JTPA services for various target groups. The experiments will involve randomly assigning JTPA-eligible persons who apply to the program to two groups--one receiving JTPA services and the other, a control group, not receiving services. The random assignment approach is aimed at eliminating the major problem with constructed comparison groups--that JTPA participants are compared with nonparticipants who may not be similar with respect to important characteristics. Such differences, for example, can bias estimates of changes in earnings. Labor believes that within 5 years it will have net impact estimates that will (1) assert cause and effect, (2) rely less on sophisticated statistical modeling and thus produce findings that are less open to question and (3) command a broad professional consensus since the data would yield a clear set of results.

Labor recognizes that using random assignment will not be popular with many program operators and applicants; it may result in turning away some needy applicants. (This has created problems in other evaluations using this approach.) However, because JTPA programs face a large oversupply of eligible applicants, Labor believes random assignment to be fair. Other practical problems of implementation also may arise, and there may be questions as to the generalizability of the results since they will be from selected sites rather than from representative national samples. Further, as with any long-term evaluation, timeliness may be a concern.

According to Labor, the above initiative will permit it to phase out the longitudinal components of its Job Training Longitudinal Survey. This is being done on a staggered basis, beginning in January 1986. In the interim, Labor will continue to gather data on transition year (Oct. 1, 1983-June 30, 1984), and program year 1984 (July 1, 1984-June 30, 1985) enrollees for 21 months after program entry. In addition, since Labor will no longer rely on its longitudinal study for net impact estimation, it will reduce the quick turnaround enrollee sample from 24,000 to 12,000 enrollees annually.[3]

Labor also is planning a 12-month follow-up on a small sample of terminees (1,000) from the quick turnaround sample which will be designed to gather information on participants' postprogram experiences. Labor hopes to be able to calculate employment rates, earnings, and welfare dependency rates for males and females and for adults and youths. However, because

---

[3]Of the 12,000 enrollees, 8,400 are in title IIA programs, and the remainder are in title III.

of the small sample size, data may not be available by type of service or for other subpopulations. Labor is reviewing the feasibility and cost effectiveness of this approach.

New proposal for reporting requirements

In January 1986, for the first time since the inception of JTPA, Labor proposed significant revisions to its annual status report in order to extend and update its reporting system. These new reporting proposals were forwarded to OMB for review and approval on January 10, 1986. OMB was still reviewing the proposals as of March 25, 1986. The reasons for the revisions cited by Labor to OMB include:

--Labor anticipates adding new performance standards for program year 1988 to measure postprogram outcomes and youth competency attainment. Therefore, data collection must begin in program year 1986 in order to obtain the information on which to base the standards.

--The revisions will permit identifying more adequately those who are difficult to serve and adjusting performance standards when SDAs serve a disproportionate number of such individuals.

Among the revisions of the annual status report are additions to data collected on program performance, participant characteristics, and program eligibility. Also, youth employment competency attainment will become a part of this reporting system. Significant among these changes is the proposed collection of postprogram data through participant follow-ups. In its justification for that addition, Labor stated that its proposed postprogram measures:

> ". . . will focus program operators on the employment and earnings and job retention of participants three months after termination. This focus will significantly strengthen the quality of the program over the current termination-based approach to program design and service delivery which merely emphasizes getting participants jobs."

Labor stated that failure to add postprogram follow-ups

> ". . . would raise questions as to whether it was conforming to the act; and continue to focus program design and service delivery on placement rather than on the goals of JTPA--to increase (long-term) earnings and reduce welfare dependency of those served by the program."

Labor also proposed (1) revisions and additions to its quarterly status report on expenditures and (2) the initiation of a new annual report on participants in the summer youth program. In its justification to OMB for the proposed revisions to the quarterly report, Labor stated that it currently has incomplete information on how states are using the set-aside funds provided under JTPA, that this report does not measure state performance against the requirement that 40 percent of title IIA funds be spent on youths, and that little management information exists to evaluate the performance of title III national reserve-funded programs or to develop options for decision makers. Labor is also proposing that this report be submitted semiannually in order to respond to congressional inquiries during the budget process and to provide a sound basis for its budget recommendations.

Labor is proposing the new report on the summer youth program because it now has no information available to measure who is being served under this portion of the act and to respond to congressional inquiries. This report would provide statewide participant characteristics data.

IMPROVEMENTS IN THE NEW REPORTING PROPOSALS AND SUGGESTED ADDITIONS

The new reporting requirements proposed by Labor, if approved by OMB, should address many of the problems and shortcomings noted by those in the job training community. These requirements should increase the data available for setting performance standards and for program management and oversight and result in more consistent data. Also, members of the job training community that we spoke with generally indicated that they would not be averse to additional reporting requirements. Some members of that community have suggested certain additional requirements.

Improvements in data collection system

Because Labor's new reporting requirements were only recently submitted to OMB for review, we did not have the time to solicit the views of members of the job training community on the specific proposals. However, these proposals should address many of the limitations the community found in Labor's current data collection system.

Annual report revision

The revised annual status report includes many of the data items included in Labor's initial proposal to OMB. Chief among these is the collection of information on the postprogram

labor-market experiences of JTPA terminees. According to Labor, postprogram measures are superior to termination-based measures in evaluating program performance.

The annual report revisions will also provide additional terminee characteristics information which, according to Labor, will permit it to better determine whether JTPA programs are serving those most difficult to serve. This, in turn, will provide the information necessary to adjust performance standards when SDAs disproportionately serve such persons. Labor stated that all the additional characteristics data items have been shown in statistical analyses to be important determinants of performance.

It is proposed that youth employment competency attainment be reported in detail. By including this element in its annual report, Labor will increase the visibility of this outcome and may encourage SDAs to serve youth dropouts and potential dropouts, and lay the groundwork for youth employment competency performance standards. However, as noted with other terms, youth employment competency will need to be more explicitly defined.

Lastly, the annual report will give Labor information on the eligibility of those being served. Under JTPA, at least 90 percent of the participants must be economically disadvantaged.

Other report revisions

The revisions to the quarterly expenditure report and the addition of a report on summer youth employment programs will give Labor additional information to manage and monitor JTPA. As Labor pointed out, it has incomplete information on state use of set-aside funds, no information on levels of participation, and no information on the characteristics of summer youth employment program participants. The revisions would correct these deficiencies, but there would be no information on client characteristics and outcomes from state set-aside funded programs. The revisions would also permit the semiannual measurement of state performance against the 40-percent youth expenditure requirement of JTPA. Reporting these data semiannually, as proposed, would enable Labor to respond to congressional inquiries during the budget process and provide a better basis for its budget recommendations. Finally, adding a new summer youth employment report would give Labor information on who is being served under this program. Currently, no participant characteristics data are reported for this program.

Proposed reporting revisions not viewed as burdensome by Labor

As discussed, OMB rejected Labor's original data collection proposal as being too burdensome on the states. In its January 1986 proposal, Labor stated that the revised requirements for the annual status report are not expected to increase the reporting burden for the states and SDAs, except for the post-program data collection, which will involve new procedures. Labor estimated that nationally the cost of follow-up will total about $3 million annually. Labor also noted that "federal reporting is the most effective method for collecting program performance and participant characteristics."

Labor also stated that the revised quarterly status report and the new summer youth report should not increase most states' reporting burden. Current systems designed to respond to present requirements aggregate the participant and expenditure data collected by SDAs on formula and set-aside funds. Labor stated that, while existing systems in some states may require modification to produce additional participant and expenditure detail called for in the revised report, the cost of modifying these systems should be moderate for most states. Also, a change to semiannual statewide cumulative reporting should not require system adjustments.

Finally, according to Labor, states would not be expected to incur substantial costs in compiling summer youth characteristics data. Many states already maintain such participant information on a centralized basis as part of eligibility determination systems and state-SDA reporting systems.

Others do not believe data collection to be burdensome

Officials from eight job training community groups, including those representing state agencies, said that the states and SDAs did not consider data collection or reporting to be burdensome. Also, officials from 10 states, two SDAs, and eight job training community groups pointed out the advantages of having detailed program information. They cited the need for such information to plan, manage, and evaluate JTPA programs. Officials from two states said that accurate and timely data would help to market the successes of JTPA and help to keep the private sector involved.

We contacted by telephone five states with participant follow-up systems in place. Estimates on the cost per follow-up by officials in these states varied, depending on the amount of data they gathered and the program activities they included. Their estimates ranged from $8 to $28 per contact and averaged about $17. Labor estimated that the cost to meet its follow-up

requirements would be about $15 per contact. In our 1985 report to the Congress on JTPA implementation,[4] we pointed out that 48 states planned some follow-up on former participants to collect postprogram data.

Additional report data desirable, according to some

While the revisions to Labor's data collection system will address many of the problems and shortcomings noted, members of the job training community believe it would be desirable to have additional data items in the annual status report. For example, as pointed out by one member of the community, there is a need for information on what training is being received by those obtaining employment and whether participants are being employed in the field for which they were trained. The other members of the community we spoke with agreed that such information would (1) help program administrators and others determine whether the training received was sufficient to facilitate employment and whether it was being offered in occupations for which openings existed and (2) encourage program planners to focus on those training services that enhance locating, obtaining, and retaining employment.

Members in the job training community we spoke with cited one or more of the following data items as being useful for refining performance standards and for other information purposes. These included: characteristics of persons served through the use of JTPA state set-aside funds and termination outcomes, persons age 55 and older,[5] veteran status, displaced homemakers, age distinctions of dependent children of single parents, and follow-up information on whether individuals remain on or receive reduced levels of welfare. In addition, members of the community recommended that the annual status report be made available more frequently to improve the timeliness of the data available for each state and SDA.

GAO OBSERVATIONS

In our view, the reporting proposals submitted by Labor to OMB in January 1986, if approved, should eliminate many of the shortcomings and limitations of the current data collection system. However, the following data limitations will continue to exist:

---

[4]Job Training Partnership Act: Initial Implementation of Program for Disadvantaged Youth and Adults, HRD-85-4, Mar. 4, 1985.

[5]The current annual status report contains this information, but Labor's proposed revisions call for "age 30 and over."

--Lack of specificity of definitions.

--Inconsistency in the data items maintained among SDAs.

--Lack of sufficient information to adequately measure the amount of training provided to program participants.

These shortcomings will limit information useful for congressional oversight of JTPA.

Labor's decision to modify its long-term effort to evaluate JTPA because of methodological problems resulted in an approach that is methodologically far more sound and should be a source of important information on JTPA. As with any evaluation, however, it may have some limitations of its own.

Labor's new reporting proposals, currently before OMB for review and approval, will provide more detailed data on JTPA program operations. In our consultations with members of the employment and training community, we found wide receptivity for more standardized and extensive program data that would assure greater uniformity and comparability, and little complaint that this would be unduly burdensome or of little utility.

The proposed new requirement for participant follow-up data is desirable. It provides valuable data on whether those reported as being placed in a job continue to hold that position and whether employment rates are maintained or improve as compared to earlier reported placement results. On the other hand, there may be technical problems--such as with follow-up methods, sampling, and nonresponse rates--that could limit the data's reliability and comparability.

The proposed revisions to Labor's reporting requirements do not include any additional guidance regarding variations in the definitions of the terms used. The job training community and state and local officials we spoke with unanimously agreed on the need for more specificity of terms within the JTPA data system.

As noted, the quick turnaround survey seeks no information on quantity of training by hours. Therefore, the amount of training provided cannot be adequately measured.

The availability of consistent data for the quick turnaround survey will continue to be a problem. The proposed changes to Labor's reporting system, if approved, will require each SDA to collect additional data beyond that required under the current system. However, those additional data items collected for the quick turnaround survey but not required by Labor's system will, more than likely, not be consistently maintained by each SDA in the sample. The quick turnaround survey seeks significantly more information than the data required for

the annual status report. For example, the survey attempts to obtain information on the type of training provided, whereas the annual report does not. In addition, the quick turnaround survey provides much more detailed data on reasons for program termination, income, type and level of public assistance, and family status.

We are uncertain how complete the quick turnaround data will be and whether the smaller sample of enrollees will be as sufficient as the original sample for a wide array of subgroup distinctions. This affects Labor's only current source of individual data on enrollees and terminees. Such individual data, rather than aggregated summary data, are necessary for analysis of groups by multiple characteristics, e.g., women by age and minorities by level of education. (The quick turnaround data have nationwide applicability only; analysis of participant characteristics, outcomes, and types of services cannot be conducted at the state or SDA level with the quick turnaround data source.)

Regarding Labor's new evaluation approach, it plans to undertake a "mini"-follow-up of 1,000 terminees from its quick turnaround survey. This is a timely way to obtain postprogram experience data, but the sample is so small that only limited disaggregation is possible. For example, the sample is too small to determine the postprogram earnings of high school dropouts, the employment rates of blacks who received classroom training, or the reduction in welfare dependency of women terminees. It is important to note that, although the longitudinal participant sample is no longer needed for net impact evaluation and is therefore being phased out, compared to the mini-follow-up, it provides a much larger sample and a much richer source of data to characterize what happened, after participation, to various population groups. The longitudinal participant sample could also have provided an extensive cross-check of Labor's data from administrative records.

Labor's planned use of random assignment experiments to estimate program net impact is a superior means of measuring effect. As with any evaluation, however, there also may be limitations. There may be implementation problems with such a rigorous design and questions regarding the generalizability of the results.

Labor has made substantial progress in redesigning its data collection system, which must still be approved by OMB, although some limitations will remain. Table 2 summarizes the improvements and limitations resulting from Labor's proposed reporting revisions.

Table 2:
Labor's Proposed Reporting Revisions—Improvements and Limitations

Report	Proposed changes	Improvements	Limitations
Annual Status Report	Additional data items on characteristics of program participants, such as "unemployed 15 or more weeks during prior 26 weeks," "post high school education," and "offender status." New data on program performance, i.e., postprogram follow-up data and youth employment competency attainment.	Improved data for setting performance standards, including information on postprogram labor market experience and youth employment competency attainment. Will improve program management and oversight, e.g., will permit identifying more adequately those more difficult to serve.	No cross-tabulations of data are possible since these are aggregated data. Broad definitions may result in data that cannot be reliably interpreted or compared soundly across states and SDAs. Some needed data items not included, e.g., client characteristics and outcomes on the 3-percent set-aside for older workers and the 8-percent set-aside for education coordination grants. Lack of timeliness (annual submission).
Quarterly Status Report (Expenditure Report)	Semiannual submission (currently submitted annually). Additional information on state set-aside expenditures, level of participation under set-aside programs, measurement of state performance against the 40-percent youth expenditure requirement.	Enables Labor to respond to congressional inquiries during the budget process and provides a basis for its budget recommendations. Alleviates some weaknesses in Labor's knowledge of states' use of set-aside funds and allows determination of whether states are meeting the youth expenditure requirements.	Quarterly submission would be preferable in order to correct problems in a timely manner.
Summer Youth Employment Program Report	Adds a new reporting requirement. Provides Labor with participant characteristics on those served under title IIB, the summer youth program, on a statewide basis.	For the first time, Labor will have information on the characteristics of those participating in the summer youth employment program, e.g., age, sex, race/ethnicity, and education status.	

Report	Proposed changes	Improvements	Limitations
Quick Turnaround Survey	Reduction of enrollee sample size from 24,000 to 12,000. (This is the only source of individual enrollee and terminee data for assessing JTPA. While also containing individual data, the longitudinal participants survey will be phased out and the proposed mini-follow-up of terminees will consist of a sample of only 1,000.)	Additional data items required by the annual status report should result in a higher response rate for individual items in the quick turnaround, since the quick turnaround is drawn from the same administrative files as the annual status report.	Reduction of enrollee sample from 24,000 to 12,000 may affect analysis of some subpopulations. Broad definitions and inconsistent data items may result in nonrepresentative national estimates. Nationwide applicability only, i.e., cannot determine participant characteristics, outcomes, or types of services at the state or SDA level. No data available on quantity of training in hours.
Mini-follow-up sample	New reporting requirement. It is a 12-month follow-up involving personal interviews with 1,000 terminees from the quick turnaround. Gathers data primarily on their postprogram experiences, such as employment rates, earnings, and welfare dependency for males and females and for adults and youths.	Provides a timely means of obtaining postprogram data on participants.	Sample of 1,000 terminees is too small for analysis of some major subpopulations, e.g., postprogram earnings of dropouts.
Longitudinal Participants Survey	Labor is phasing out this sample beginning in calendar year 1986. It will continue to gather data on transition year and program year 1984 enrollees for 21 months after program entry.	Not applicable since this sample is being phased out.	By phasing out the longitudinal participants survey, Labor will be eliminating a larger sample and richer data source than the mini-follow-up which it is introducing.

Report	Proposed changes	Improvements	Limitations
Multi-site field experiments	This approach for estimating program impact replaces the longitudinal participants survey and constructed comparison group samples that were in the original Job Training Longitudinal Survey. Field experiments will be conducted at up to 20 SDAs to evaluate benefits and costs of JTPA services for various target groups. Experiments will involve random assignment.	Because of the nature of the experiments, i.e., random assignment, the impact estimates should assert causes and effect, rely less on complex statistical modeling, and command a broad professional consensus.	There may be practical problems of implementation, such as gaining the cooperation of program managers in the use of random assignment. Will not provide national estimates. Inherent problem of timeliness, i.e., findings on impact will not be available for several years.

(205058)

*U.S. G.P.O. 1987-181-235:60007

Requests for copies of GAO reports should be sent to:

U.S. General Accounting Office
Post Office Box 6015
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877

Telephone 202-275-6241

The first five copies of each report are free. Additional copies are $2.00 each.

There is a 25% discount on orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address.

Orders must be prepaid by cash or by check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents.